A short history of the Hootenanny Mass & other absurdities

Rev. Know it all

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Chapter 1

Dear Rev. Know it all...

November 13, 2010

Dear Rev. Know it all,

Can you explain why all of a sudden we stopped singing Gregorian chant and started singing Kumbaya at Mass and now we have stopped singing Kumbaya and now we are singing dreary Gregorian chant again. I miss those old, traditional hymns with stirring music and lyrics that we could all sing and understand, words like "eat His body, drink His blood, and we'll sing a song of love, halelu, halelu, halelu-u-yah" written by the immortal Ray Repp. I am so confused.

Yours, Harold "Hoot" and Annie Gibson

Dear "Hoot" and Annie,

Of course I can, but it will be very long and very boring and you will have to pay attention. The problem begins in 1300 AD, more or less with Philip the Fair, king of France and Edward I "Longshanks" of England (who disemboweled Mel Gibson in the movie "Braveheart"). They were at war over the province of Gascony and to finance the war they both wanted to tax the clergy and the Church. Pope Boniface VIII said "Over my dead body!" and King Philip of France said, "That could be arranged."

So, Philip tried to kidnap the Pope, but merely managed to have him beat up by thugs on September 7, 1303. He died a month later. The cardinals elected an Italian, Benedict XI, who managed to survive eight months, so the cardinals thought they should elect somebody who could get along with the king of France. They chose a fellow named Raymond Bertrand de Got who was not at the election. He wasn't even a cardinal, nor was he in Rome at the time. He was in France. This was reasonable because he was, in fact, French.

The cardinals thought he would be neutral and make nice with the king. He was crowned pope in a grand ceremony attended by the King in Lyons, France. He never quite made it to Rome, the city of which he was now bishop. He got as far as Avignon, now part of France, then owned by the king of Sicily. And there they stayed until, seven popes later, Pope Gregory XI was elected in 1370. He was pope until 1378, and was the last of the Avignon Popes. His return to Rome on January 17, 1377 was inspired by the prophecies of St. Catherine of Siena.

Problem solved? Hardly! This is where things get really bad. After the death of Pope Gregory XI, an Italian, Urban VI was elected. He had some odd ideas about cardinals, like avoiding gratuities and gifts, and accepting salaries from kings and noblemen and limiting luxuries and retinues, and the multiple benefices (clerical sources of revenue). And he refused to move back to Avignon, which irritated King Charles V of France. The cardinals were deeply insulted and five months after Urban's election, the French cardinals met at Anagni, to declare his election invalid because they had been intimidated by the Roman mob (which can, in fact, be intimidating) into electing an Italian pope. So, they elected Robert of Geneva who was commander of the papal troops. He became the anti-pope Clement VII, and thus began the Western Schism which divided Catholic Christendom until 1417.

Nobody knew who was on first, authority wise. You had two popes, one in Avignon and one in Rome. France, Spain, Naples, and Scotland recognized the Avignon pope. Denmark, England, Flanders, Germany, Hungary, northern Italy, Ireland, Norway, Poland, and Sweden recognized the Roman pope. At one point there were three popes. Finally, the Council of Constance met in 1414, authorized by the legitimate successor of Urban VI, (remember him? The true pope in Rome?) The Council of Constance elected the new pope, whom (almost) everybody recognized. Finally, problem solved. Not on your

life!!! Now it gets really, really bad.

While no one was paying attention, a few things happened. The Church had become enmeshed in the politics of Europe, there were good and godly clergy and there were some not quite so good and godly, just like now, and then there was the black death. Over a period of 2-4 years, beginning in 1348 the Bubonic plague wiped out as much as half of the population of Europe. The death rate among clergy was much higher, perhaps two thirds. Parish priests and monks who were doing their jobs caught the plague and died.

In Avignon, Pope Clement VI's physicians told him to surround himself with torches to hide from the plague. But he remained at his post in Avignon supervising pastoral care of the sick and burials. He never caught disease. He wasn't a man noted for his holiness, but in this case he did his job. I would probably have hidden under my bed, whimpering and trying not to inhale.

So the good priests died, there was chaos in the leadership of the Church for about a century and the aristocracy tried to take over the Church. In this chaotic climate, there arose people who thought they knew what to do. The first of these was a priest named John Wycliffe in England, (1324-1384) who was in effect the father of the Protestant Reformation a full century before Luther.

Chapter 2

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There is no denying that in the 1400's there were problems in the Church in Europe. The concept of the nation-state was developing as well as the concept of the divine right of kings. These are important ideas.

In the middle ages, there were no "countries" as such, in Europe. There was CHRISTENDOM. The German barbarians (my ancestors) had swept into the Western Roman Empire around 400AD. At that time the Romans had been Christian for almost two centuries. Rome thought of itself as the Christian Empire. Admittedly, the emperors had moved their capital to the town of Byzantium, around 340AD. They called it New Rome, but everybody called it Constantinople, "Constantine's town." Sadly, today you can't go back to Constantinople because now it's Istanbul. So the Emperors moved east, but the bishop of Rome, acknowledged by ALL Christians as the head Bishop of the Universal Church, stayed in Rome and maintained his political independence from the Roman state. Thus in the years from 400 to1400 there were two forces to be reckoned with : Pope and Emperor. The popes gradually took over the civil administration of central Italy and bishops everywhere took on more and more functions of the state, such as the maintenance of public safety and the care of the poor.

Then came my people, the barbarians. The barbarians didn't want to destroy the Roman empire. They wanted to join it. What wasn't to like? The Romans had indoor plumbing. They bathed. They weren't covered with

fleas and they drank wine! And who doesn't like Italian food? The invading barbarians just wanted peace: a piece of the Roman Empire. And to get it they were happy to swear allegiance to the Emperor in Constantinople, and just go on pretending that they were a new kind of Roman, though they still mostly drank beer.

There were problems however. The barbarians governed themselves differently. They had a system by which soldiers swore allegiance to a military leader or tribal chief and that leader in turn swore allegiance to a king. Romans had a long history of written laws with a combination of elected and appointed rulers. This presented no real problem. The barbarian kings just swore allegiance to the emperor in Constantinople and then did as they pleased.

Another, perhaps larger problem was that the Romans were Catholics who believed that Jesus was God and man and that God was a unity of love called the Trinity. The barbarians were Arians, who believed that Jesus was not really divine. God was a lone ranger who sort of adopted Jesus. The Roman Bishops defended their Catholic congregations from these new overlords, and eventually the barbarian overlords became Catholic and settled in for the next 1,000 years to rule their Roman and Catholic subjects.

Thus was born the Middle ages, a collection of dukedoms and squires and knights and feudal oaths all loosely held together by kings and all swearing allegiance to an emperor, first the one in Byzantium and then one in Aachen Germany called Charlemagne. His descendants quibbled ever after as to who would be elected the Holy Roman Emperor. (WAKE UP!!! THIS PART'S IMPORTANT. I MEAN THE BIT ABOUT ELECTING THE EMPEROR.)

It was hard to tell where the Church left off and the State began, because it was all a big banquet called CHRISTENDOM. The task was to fight off the Mongols and the Muslims who wanted to destroy Christendom. The Muslims eventually did destroy the Christian heartland around North Africa, Spain, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and the Holy Land. By 1400, the Eastern Roman Empire held on by a thread in Greece and Western Turkey and only Western Europe was Christian and of the ancient Christian lands of the Mediterranean only Northern Italy, Greece and France remained Christian. Christianity looked like it was finished. Only the northern barbarians were Christian, and the Russians and the other Slavic countries, but Russia and Eastern Europe had been overrun by the Golden Horde, who were Muslims.

In Europe, things went from bad to worse. The papacy, as I've mentioned was a wreck which no one took seriously, the clergy had been decimated by the plague, as had society in general and there weren't enough peasants to work the land. The cost of labor skyrocketed, and the old feudal system that had kept Europe fairly stable for a almost a thousand years collapsed. Wycliffe and Hus went around condemning clerical corruption, and unfortunately they had a point. Wycliffe's followers were called the Lollards and they did a whole lot more than just point out the corruption of the post-black death clergy. They and Wycliffe denied the papacy, monasticism and the sacrificial nature of the Mass. They taught predestination and an early form of "Bible Only" (Sola Scriptura.) In short, they were Lutherans a hundred years before Luther. Their idea ideas spread in particular in Bohemia, which was at that time part of central Germany.

"How does one get from England to Bohemia? " I am sure you are asking. Simple: Anne of Bohemia who came to England at the end of January 1381 to become the wife of Richard II (1367–1400). Anne was instrumental in spreading Wycliffe's teachings because the Bohemians who came with her to England introduced his writings to Jan Hus who spread them in Bohemia and the adjacent areas of Germany. Just to demonstrate the mess, it is interesting to note that Anne's brother, King Wenceslaus got involved in the squabble between the Roman pope and the Avignon anti-pope. All this is bad enough, but there was one more thing that put the frosting on the cake.

Wycliffe wanted the state to take over Church properties in England. Well, that sounds reasonable. Remember the clergy were corrupt! (Some certainly were, many more weren't. It was the monks with their land holdings and incomes who maintained the schools, the hospitals, the soup kitchens, the shelters for the poor, the orphanages, and rented land to poor peasants at a minimal fee saving them from aristocratic vultures who treated them as slaves.) Wycliffe attacked the clergy and taught that the king is above the pope, in temporal matters and that the collection of annates (a type of fee paid to the pope) and indulgences were simony. He also taught that good government required that the Church be without political influence. (Sounds like the ACLU, no?) Wycliffe would have been in big trouble, had he not found a protector in John of Gaunt, 1st Duke of Lancaster, 1340–1399 who was acting as ruler at this time. Duke John ran England and really liked some of Wycliffe's ideas. The king should run things, not the bishops. After all, kings and dukes and generalissimos and Chicago aldermen and mayors

really have the people's best interest at heart.

Remember that the old feudal system had collapsed, and kings and nations were emerging. Instead of Christendom, the emperors and the popes, you now had France and England and Aragon and Castile. The little duchies and squires that made up Europe were about to become nations with divinely appointed kings who wanted no pope or bishop to tell them what to do. Without a pope to excommunicate them or depose them, they would go to war with each other for the next 500 years, until Europe exhausted herself and her Christian culture in that holocaust of the 1st and 2nd world wars in which at least One Hundred Million people died, all told, and in which it seems that Europe herself has died. The final ingredients in this witch's brew: Johannes Gutenberg's printing press (about 1450) and that irrepressible German monk, Father Martin Luther (1483–1546).

Chapter 3

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